
TIMAEUS: How pleased I am to have come to the end of my 106a
account, Socrates! I feel as relieved as someone resting after
a long journey, now that I've finished with it. And my prayer
to the god who has just been created in my speech (though of
course he was created long ago, in fact) is that for our sakes
he may keep safe everything that was well said, and that if we b
inadvertently struck a false note he will impose the appropri-
ate penalty—and the right penalty when someone is out of
tune is to make him harmonious. I pray, then, for the gift of
knowledge, the most perfect and most effective medicine,* so
that in the future any account we give of the creation of gods
may be accurate. And with this prayer I make way for Critias,
as we agreed: it's his turn to speak now.

CRITIAS: Well, Timaeus, I'm ready, but first I have a request
to make—the same one that you relied on at the beginning c
of your speech, when you asked for leniency given the
immensity of the topics you were going to address. In fact,
I think I have even more of a right to leniency, and to more 107a
of it, for what I'm about to say. And despite being pretty
sure that, in making the request, I'll seem more than a little
self-important and unduly rude, I still have to make it. I'm
not suggesting that anything in your speech was less than
excellent—how could anyone in their right mind presume
to do so?—but I do want to try to show that what remains
to be said is actually more difficult, and therefore calls for
more leniency. You see, Timaeus, it's easier for someone to
give an impression of competence in speaking to us humans
about gods than it is when the subject of his speech is mortal b
men. When the audience's situation is one of inexperience
and downright ignorance of a topic, that makes it rather easy
for someone to address it—and, of course, we know how
we're placed when the topic is the gods.

I can make my meaning clearer if you'll just bear with me for a while. Our words are never going to be more than images and representations of things, I'd say, so let's look at how painters go about creating images of divine and human figures, in terms of how easy or difficult they find it to get the viewers to think that they've produced an adequate representation. Take things like the landscape, or mountains, rivers, and woodland, or the sky as a whole, as well as the bodies that exist and move in it. We shall find, first, that we're satisfied if an artist is capable of representing any of these things in a way that even vaguely resembles them, and also that, since our knowledge of such things is inexact, we don't criticize or challenge the painted images, but in these cases are content with an imprecise and deceptive outline.* When an artist tries to represent human bodies, however, our constant familiarity with them means that we quickly spot any flaws, and we turn into harsh critics of anyone who fails to produce perfectly exact likenesses.

We're bound to think that the same phenomenon applies to speeches too: we're content with discussions of divine, heavenly bodies if they bear no more than a slight resemblance to the originals, whereas we subject discussions of mortal, human affairs to detailed critical scrutiny. So allowances should be made if in the improvised speech I'm about to give I prove incapable of producing an account that does justice to its subject in all respects, because we ought to think it hard, rather than easy, to produce a likeness of humans and their affairs that satisfies people's expectations. Anyway, my reason for saying all this, Socrates, is not just that I wanted to remind you all of these facts, but to ask you to show more leniency, not less, towards the speech I'm about to make. If you think my request for this favour is fair, do please grant it, without any further prompting from me.

108a SOCRATES: Of course we will, Critias—and let's make the same allowance for Hermocrates too, our third speaker, since it's plain to see that before long he's going to be asking

for the same favour as you two, when it's his turn to speak. b
 To help him come up with a different preamble, rather than
 feeling compelled to use the same one, he may speak, when
 the time comes, knowing that he already has our forbearance.
 But I should warn you, my dear Critias, of your audience's
 state of mind: the playwright who preceded you went down
 amazingly well with it, so you'll need a very great deal of
 leniency if you're to prove yourself a competent successor.*

HERMOCRATES: Your warning applies to me as much as to our c
 friend here, Socrates. All the same, Critias, no trophy was ever
 set up by faint-hearted men: you must advance courageously
 to your speech and, with an invocation to Apollo Paean* and
 the Muses, demonstrate that these fellow citizens of yours from
 long ago were men of virtue, and sing their praises.

CRITIAS: Hermocrates, my friend, the reason you still feel bold d
 is that you've been positioned in the rear, with someone else
 before you; but you'll find out soon enough what the front
 line is like. Be that as it may, I shall do as you say, spurred on
 by your encouragement and advice. I had better invoke not
 only the gods you mentioned, but all the rest of them as well,
 especially Memory, as the deity responsible for all the most
 important aspects of my account. If I can remember and
 report with sufficient accuracy the tale once told by the priests
 and brought here by Solon, I'm pretty sure that this audience c
 here will judge me to have fulfilled my task well enough. So
 that's what I had better do now, with no further delay.

Let's recall, first, that in all 9,000 years* have passed since e
 war was declared between those who lived beyond and those
 who lived within the Pillars of Heracles. This is the war
 whose course I shall now describe. It is said that one side was
 led right through to the end of the fighting by Athens, while
 the other side was commanded by the kings of Atlantis—an
 island which, as we said, was once larger than Libya and
 Asia, though by now earthquakes have caused it to sink and
 it has left behind unnavigable mud, which obstructs those 109a

who sail out there into the ocean.* As our tale unfolds, so to speak, along its course, there will be opportunities to reveal details of the many non-Greek peoples and all the Greek communities that existed then, but first we must start with an account of the resources and the political systems of the Athenians of the time and their opponents in the war. And of the two sides, Athens had better go first.

- b Once upon a time, the gods divided the whole earth among themselves, region by region. There were no disputes involved;* after all, it makes no sense for the gods not to know what is appropriate to each of them and, since they do have such knowledge, it is illogical to believe that they would dispute claims and try to gain what properly belonged to another one of them. So each gained by just allocation what belonged to him, established communities in his lands, and, having done so, began to look after us, his property and creatures, as a shepherd does his flocks, with the difference
- c that they did not use physical means of compulsion. Shepherds use blows as they tend to their flocks, but the gods focused on that part of each creature which makes it most easy to steer, like helmsmen steering from the stern; they took hold of its mind, employed the rudder of persuasion as they saw fit, and in this way guided and led every mortal creature as a whole.

- As a result of the allocation, various gods gained various regions to govern, and Hephaestus and Athena (who are very similar in nature, not just because they are brother and sister, with a common father, but also because their love of education and of craft give them the same goals) gained Athens here as their shared allocation, since the nature of the district was such that it was suitable for courage and
- d intelligence.* So they created men of courage, who were born from the ground,* and implanted in their minds the outline of their political system.

Although the names of these first Athenians have been preserved, their achievements have been obliterated by the

destruction of their successors and the long passage of time. I've already mentioned the reason for this: those who survived on each occasion were illiterate mountain-dwellers, who had heard only the names of the rulers of the land and knew hardly anything about their achievements. They were happy to name their children after their predecessors, but were unaware of their acts of courage and their customs, except for the occasional obscure rumour about this or that. For many generations, they and their children were short of essentials, and this problem was what occupied their minds and their conversations, rather than events of the distant past. After all, storytelling and enquiring about the past arrive in communities along with leisure, when and only when they see that some people have been adequately supplied with the necessities of life. 110a

Anyway, this is how the names but not the achievements of those men of old came to be preserved. My evidence for saying this is that, according to Solon, the account those priests gave of the war of that time included not only most of the names of Cecrops, Erechtheus, Erichthonius, Erysichthon, and the other predecessors of Theseus,* but also attributed most of their achievements to each of them by name, and did the same for their wives too. And another point, relevant to the way the goddess is portrayed, is that, according to Solon, in those days military training was undertaken by women as well as by men, and that it was in accordance with this practice that people in those days began to display the goddess in armour. It was a token of the fact that all gregarious animals, female and male, have been equally equipped by their natures to practise the virtue peculiar to their species. b c

In those days, most of the inhabitants of this land — most classes of citizens — were occupied with the crafts and with agriculture, but the warrior class, which from the very beginning had been separated off by godlike men,* lived apart. They had everything that was appropriate for their sustenance and training, they owned no private property and regarded d

everything as held in common by them all, and they did not expect the rest of their fellow citizens to provide them with more than an adequate supply of food. In fact, their way of life was in all respects the same as that described yesterday for our imaginary guardians.*

e Then again, the old stories about our land are reliable and true: above all, in those days its border was formed by the Isthmus and, in relation to the rest of the mainland, our territory extended as far as the hills of Cithaeron and Parnes, and went down to the coast, with Oropus on the right and the Asopus forming the border on the left.* There was no soil to compare with ours anywhere in the world, which is why the territory was capable in those days of supporting a large number of soldiers who were exempt from working the land.* There is convincing proof of how good the soil was: the remnant of it that still exists is a match for any soil in its ability to produce a good yield of any crop, and in the rich
 111a pasturage it provides for all sorts of animals. But in those days the soil produced crops in vast quantities and of high quality.

Why should we trust this picture? Why are we right to call the soil of modern Attica a remnant of the soil of those days? Attica is nothing but a headland, so to speak, jutting far out into the sea from the rest of the mainland, surrounded by a seabed which drops off close to the shore to a considerable depth. So although there have been many devastating floods in the course of the 9,000-year interval
 b between then and now, the soil washed down from the highlands in all these years and during these disasters has not formed any considerable pile of sediment, as it does elsewhere, but is constantly rolled down into the depths, where it vanishes. Just as on the small islands,* what remains now is, compared with those days, like the skeleton of a body wasted by disease: the soil, or at any rate as much of it as is rich and soft, has rolled away, and only the spare body of the land remains.

In those days, however, the land was intact, our mountains were just high mounds, what we now call the Stony Plains were filled with rich soil, and the highlands were covered with dense forests (of which there are traces even now). Nowadays some of our mountains sustain only bees, but not long ago trees from there were cut as roof-timbers for very substantial buildings, and the roofs are still sound. Cultivated trees grew tall and plentiful, and the soil bore limitless fodder for our flocks and herds. Moreover, the ground benefited from the rain sent each year by Zeus and didn't lose it, as it does nowadays with the water flowing off the bare ground and into the sea. Instead, because the ground had plenty of soil to absorb moisture, it stored the rain on a layer of impermeable clay, let the water flow down from the high ground into the low ground of every district, and so provided abundant springs to feed streams and rivers. Even now there are still shrines, left over from the old days, at the sites of former springs, as tokens of the truth of this account of the land.

So much for the characteristics of the land in general. It was ordered as well as you might expect, given that the farmers were true farmers (that is, they were specialists at their job, and were endowed with noble aims and natural ability) and given that they had outstandingly good soil to work with, plenty of water, and a perfectly tempered climate from the skies above. As for the state of the town in those days, in the first place the Acropolis was different from now, since by now it has suffered from the effects of a single night of torrential rain which washed away the soil and left the Acropolis bare; and this appalling deluge—the third destruction by water before the one that took place in the time of Deucalion*—was also accompanied by earthquakes. Before then, the Acropolis extended from the Eridanus to the Ilissus, included the Pnyx,* and ended, on the side opposite the Pnyx, with the Lycabettus; and the entire Acropolis was covered in soil and was almost all level. Outside the

Acropolis, under its flanks, were the dwellings of the craftsmen and those farmers who worked the nearby land.

The top of the Acropolis had been settled by the warriors, who lived all by themselves around the temple of Athena and Hephaestus, and had also enclosed the heights within a single wall, like the garden of a single house. They lived in communal houses on the northern side of the Acropolis, they had constructed messes to be shared by all in cold weather, and they had provided themselves with everything that was in keeping with their communal institutions—everything in the way of buildings and temples, that is, not gold and silver, for which they never had any use. In pursuit of the mean between extravagance and dependence, they built moderate houses in which they and their descendants could grow old and which they could bequeath to others just like themselves. And when, as you would expect in the summer, they left their gardens, gymnasias, and messes, they used the southern side for these functions. There was a single spring in the area of the present Acropolis, but it has been clogged up by earthquakes, so that now there's only a trickle of water near the present hill; but in those days it supplied everyone with plenty of water and kept a constant temperature throughout the year.

That was how they lived. As guardians of their own fellow citizens and of all other Greeks, who were their willing subjects,* they did their best to ensure that at any given time there were among them the same number of men and women—around twenty thousand—who had reached the age of military service or were not too old for it. This, then, was what the Athenians were like in those days, and their way of life was more or less as I've said. They equitably managed their own affairs and those of Greece, and they were renowned throughout Europe and Asia for their physical beauty and for their many outstanding mental qualities. Their fame surpassed that of all their contemporaries.

Now let's turn to their opponents in the war. Friends hold all things in common, so assuming I can remember it, I shall

now reveal to you what I was told in my childhood about what they were like and how their way of life evolved. But first, there's a small point I should explain before telling the tale, 113a otherwise you might be surprised at constantly hearing Greek names applied to non-Greek people. I'll tell you how this came about. Solon was planning to compose a poetic version of the tale, so he asked about the meanings of the names and found that the Egyptians who had first written the story down had translated them into their own language. So he did the same: he referred back to the sense of each name and adapted it to our language before committing it to b writing. And it is his written version which once belonged to my grandfather and is now in my possession. I studied the manuscript carefully when I was young. So if you hear Greek-sounding names, don't be surprised: you now know why.* Anyway, it's a long story and it began somewhat as follows.

As I said earlier, the gods parcelled out the entire world among themselves, allocated themselves larger or smaller territories, and established their own shrines and sacrificial c rituals. Poseidon gained the island of Atlantis as his province, and he settled there the children borne for him by a mortal woman in a certain part of the island. To be specific, halfway along the coastline there was a plain which is said to have been unsurpassable in its beauty, and good and fertile too. Close to the plain and halfway along its extent, about fifty stades* distant from the coast, there was a hill of no great prominence. There lived on this hill a man who was one of the original earth-born men of the land. He was called d Evenor and he lived with his wife, Leucippe. They had just the one child, a daughter called Cleito. When the girl reached the age for marriage, both her mother and her father died, but Poseidon, who had come to desire her, made her his concubine. He gave the hill where she lived secure defences by breaking it off from the surrounding land and creating increasingly large concentric rings, alternately of land and

water, around it. Two of the rings were of land, three of water, and he made them equidistant from the centre, as if he had taken the middle of the island as the pivot of a lathe.* And
 e so the island became inaccessible to others, because in those days ships and sailing had not yet been invented.*

Poseidon, as a god, easily organized the central island. Once he had fetched up two underground springs—one warm, the other flowing cold from its source—and caused all kinds of food to grow in sufficient quantities from the soil, he fathered and reared five pairs of twin sons. Then he divided
 114a the island of Atlantis into ten parts. He gave the firstborn of the eldest twins his mother's home and the plot of land around it, which was larger and more fertile than anywhere else, and made him king of all his brothers, while giving each of the others many subjects and plenty of land to rule over.

He named all his sons. To the eldest, the king, he gave the name from which the names of the whole island and of the
 b ocean are derived—that is, the ocean was called the Atlantic because the name of the first king was Atlas. To his twin, the one who was born next, who was assigned the edge of the island which is closest to the Pillars of Heracles and faces the land which is now called the territory of Gadeira after him, he gave a name which in Greek would be Eumelus, though in the local language it was Gadeirus, and so this must be the origin of the name of Gadeira.* He called the next pair
 c of twins Ampheres and Evaemon; he named the elder of the third pair Mneseus and the younger one Autochthon; of the fourth pair, the eldest was called Elasippus and the younger one Mestor; in the case of the fifth pair, he called the firstborn Azaes and the second-born Diaprepes. So all his sons and their descendants lived there for many generations, and in addition to ruling over numerous other islands in the ocean, they also, as I said before,* governed all the land this
 side of the Pillars of Heracles up to Egypt and Etruria.

d Atlas' family flourished in numbers and prestige. In each generation the eldest was king and passed the kingship on to

the eldest of his offspring. In this way the dynasty survived for many generations and they grew enormously rich, with more wealth than anyone from any earlier royal line and more than anyone later would easily gain either; and they were supplied with everything they needed for the city and the rest of their territory too. Their empire brought them many goods from abroad, but the island by itself provided e them with most of the necessities of life. In the first place, they had everything, solid or fusible,* that could be mined from the ground, and in fact in many parts of the island there was dug up from the ground something which is now no more than a name, although in those days it was an actual fact and was second in value only to gold—*orichalc*.* Second, woodland produced plenty of every kind of timber that builders might need for their labours, and bore enough food for both wild and domesticated animals. In fact, there were even large numbers of elephants there, because there was ample grazing for all creatures—not just for those whose habitats were marshes and lakes and rivers, or again for those that lived in mountains or on the plains, but equally 115a for this creature too, the largest and most voracious in the world.

Third, everything aromatic the earth produces today in the way of roots or shoots or shrubs or gums exuded by flowers or fruits was produced and supported by the island then. Fourth, as for cultivated crops—both the dry sort (that is, our staple and all the others we use as foodstuffs, which we collectively call ‘pulses’) and the arboreal sort b (not only the sources of our drink and food and oil, but also the produce of fruit-bearing trees which, though hard to store, exists for the sake of our amusement and our pleasure, and also all those things we offer a man who is full up as an enjoyable dessert to relieve his satiety*)—all these things were in those days produced in vast quantities and of a remarkably high quality by that sacred, sun-drenched island.

Enriched by all these agricultural products, they set about
 c building shrines, royal mansions, harbours, and shipyards,
 and organized the whole of their territory along the follow-
 ing lines. The first thing they did was build bridges across
 the rings of water surrounding the ancient mother-city, to
 create a road to and from the palace. The palace was the very
 first thing they had built in the place where Poseidon and
 their ancestors had lived, and it was passed down from gen-
 eration to generation, with each new king embellishing what
 d was already embellished and trying as best he could to outdo
 his predecessors, until they had created a building of aston-
 ishing size and beauty.

What they did first was dig a canal from the sea to the
 outermost ring. The canal was three plethra wide, a hundred
 feet deep, and fifty stades long,* and with a mouth wide
 enough for the largest ships it allowed vessels to sail from
 the sea to the outermost ring and to use it as a harbour.
 e Moreover, at the points where they had built the bridges,
 they opened up gaps in the intermediate rings of land wide
 enough to allow a single warship to sail through from one
 ring of water to another, and they roofed these canals over
 so as to create an underground sailing passage below,* for
 the banks of the rings of land were high enough above the
 level of the water to allow them to do this.

The largest ring of water—the one into which the sea
 had been channelled—was three stades wide, and the next
 ring of land was the same size. Of the second pair, the ring
 of water was two stades wide, and the ring of land was again
 the same size as the preceding ring of water. The ring of
 water which immediately surrounded the central island was
 116a a stade in width, while the island (where the palace was) had
 a diameter of five stades.

They surrounded the central island and the rings of land
 and the bridges (which were one plethron wide) on both sides
 with a stone wall, and built towers and gates on the bridges
 at each side, at the points where there were the passages for

the water. They quarried the stone (some white, some black, and some red) from underneath the perimeter of the central island and from under the outside and inside of the rings of land, so that at the same time they hollowed out internal, b double-sided docks, roofed over by bedrock. They made some of their buildings plain, but to avoid monotony they patterned others by combining stones, which gave the buildings a naturally pleasant appearance. They covered the entire circuit of the wall around the outermost ring with a paste, so to speak, of bronze; they smeared a layer of melted tin on the wall of the inner ring; and for the wall around the acropolis itself they used orichalc, which gleamed like fire. c

The palace inside the acropolis was laid out with, in its very centre, a sacrosanct shrine dedicated to Cleito and Poseidon, surrounded by a low wall of gold. This was the spot where they had originally conceived and fathered the ten kings. It was here too, in this shrine, that in an annual ritual each of the ten kings received first-fruits from all the ten regions. There was a temple of Poseidon there, which was a stade long and three plethra wide, and its height was aesthetically d proportionate with these base measurements. There was something non-Greek about the appearance of the temple.* Outside, it was entirely covered with silver, except for the acroteria,* which were gold. Inside, the entire surface of the ceiling was ivory decorated with gold, silver, and orichalc, and all the walls, pillars, and pavements were covered with orichalc. They set up a golden statue there of the god standing on a chariot with a team of six winged horses, tall enough to e touch the roof with his head. He was surrounded by a hundred further statues of Nereids on dolphins (in those days, people thought there were this many Nereids*), and the temple also held many other statues, which had been dedicated by private individuals.

Outside, the temple was surrounded by golden statues of all the ten kings and their wives, and there were numerous other substantial dedications, given by both the kings and

117a private individuals from the city itself and also from the foreign territories of their empire. The altar conformed to this structure in size and workmanship, and the palace was equally in keeping not just with the size of the empire, but also with the beauty of the shrine.

b They drew their water from the two springs (one of cold and the other of warm water), each of which was fantastically well suited to its function in respect of the taste and the quality of the water, which it produced in generous quantities. They surrounded the springs with buildings and with copses of suitable trees, and also with pools, some of which they left open to the air, while they protected with roofs those that were used in the winters as warm baths. There were separate sets of pools—some for the royal families, some for private citizens, others for women, and yet others for horses and other working animals—and each pool was organized in the appropriate fashion. Any water which overflowed was channelled to the grove of Poseidon, where all the various species of trees grew to be beautiful and extraordinarily tall thanks to the fertility of the soil, and was then conducted to the rings beyond the island by pipes beside the bridges.

c Numerous shrines, sacred to a large number of gods, had been built on these outer rings, and there were plenty of gardens and gymnasia there too. There were separate exercise-grounds for men and for horses on each of the two islands formed by the rings and, above all, in the middle of the larger of the two island-rings they had an area reserved as a hippodrome. The hippodrome was a stade wide and ran all the way around the ring, as a space dedicated to equestrian contests. Most of the bodyguards* lived in guardhouses on either side of the hippodrome, but the more trusted ones were assigned barracks on the smaller ring, closer to the acropolis, and those who were exceptionally trustworthy were allowed to live in close proximity to the kings themselves within the acropolis. The shipyards were filled with warships and with

all the equipment they required, and everything was kept in a state of readiness.

So much for the way the royal household was fitted out. Past the three external harbours a wall ran all around, starting at the sea, at a constant distance of fifty stades from the largest ring and its harbour, and completed its circuit at the point where it began, at the mouth of the canal by the sea. This whole area was crowded with a great many houses, and the canal and the largest harbour teemed with merchant ships and traders arriving from all over the world, in such large numbers that all day and all night long the place resounded with shouts and with general uproar and noise.

I have now pretty well covered the original account of the town and the ancient palace, and I had better try to tell you what the character and the arrangement of the rest of the land was like. To begin with, the whole region was said to be very high, with sheer cliffs along the coastline, but near the city there was nothing but a plain, which surrounded the city and was itself surrounded by mountains which reached down to the sea. The plain was uniformly flat and basically oblong: it extended in one direction for 3,000 stades and inland across its centre for 2,000 stades from the sea. This part of the island as a whole faced south* and was sheltered from the north winds. The mountains that surrounded the plain were celebrated in those days for their number, size, and beauty; there are no mountains today which come close to them in these respects. There were in the mountains many wealthy villages with their rural populations; rivers, lakes, and meadows kept every species of tame and wild creature adequately supplied with food; and there was plenty of timber, of various types, which was more than sufficient for any kind of task and for every occasion.

As a result of its nature, and of many years of engineering by successive kings, the plain had taken on the following character. It was originally, as I said, largely rectangular, straight-sided, and oblong, but because it wasn't perfectly

oblong they made it straight by surrounding it with a trench. The reported scale of this trench—its depth and width and length—was incredible: it's hard to believe that, on top of all their other labours, any work of human hands should be so huge. Still, I must tell you what I was told. It was excavated to a depth of a plethron, it was a stade wide all the way
 d around, and its length, once the whole perimeter of the plain had been excavated, was 10,000 stades. Streams descending from the mountains drained into it, and it made a complete circuit of the plain, so that it reached the city from both sides, and then the water was allowed to discharge into the sea.

Inland from the city straight canals with a width of about 100 feet had been cut across the plain and debouched into the trench on the coastal side; each canal was 100 stades away from its neighbours. They used them not only to bring
 e timber down to the city from the mountains, but also for the ships with which they transported all the rest of their produce in its season. They also cut cross-channels at right angles to the canals, linking the canals to one another and to the city. They harvested their crops twice a year; in winter they relied on rain sent by Zeus, but in summer they diverted water from the canals to all their crops.

As for the number of plain-dwelling men who were to be
 119a available for military service, it had been decreed that each plot (there were 60,000 in all, each ten by ten stades in area) was to provide one officer. There were, apparently, enormous numbers of men from the mountains and the rest of the land, and they were all assigned, district by district and village by village, to these plots and their officers. Each officer was instructed to supply for military use a sixth part of a war chariot (making a total of 10,000 chariots); two horses with riders; a pair of team horses without a chariot
 b but with a light-armed soldier for dismounting, a charioteer for the pair of horses, and an on-board soldier; two hoplites; two archers and the same number of slingers; three unarmed

men to throw stones and the same number to throw javelins; and four sailors towards the total of 1,200 ships. This was how the royal city was organized militarily; the other nine cities did things differently, but it would take too long to explain their systems too.

I shall now tell you what the original arrangements were c for the wielding of power and authority. In his own particular region and where his own city was concerned, each of the ten kings had authority over the citizens and was more powerful than most of the laws, in the sense that he could punish and kill at whim. But among themselves authority and interaction were governed by the regulations of Poseidon, as bequeathed to them by tradition and by a stele of orichalc inscribed by their first ancestors and set up in the middle of d the island in the shrine of Poseidon, where they used to meet, at intervals alternately of four and five years, so as to privilege neither odd nor even numbers. When they met, they would not only discuss matters of general interest, but also test one another, to see if any of them had infringed the regulations, and try any offender.

When the time of trial arrived, the first thing they did was give assurances to one another, as follows. In the shrine of Poseidon there were consecrated bulls, and once the ten were alone they asked the god in their prayers to allow them to capture a sacrificial victim that would please him. They e then took up sticks and nooses (not weapons of iron) and set about chasing the bulls, and once they had caught one they led it to the stele and cut its throat above the crown of the stele, so that its blood flowed over the inscription. In addition to the regulations the stele was inscribed with an oath which called down terrible curses on anyone who disobeyed the regulations.

So when they had sacrificed the bull in their traditional 120a manner and had burnt all its limbs, they prepared a mixing-bowl of wine and threw in one clot of blood for each of them. The rest of the blood they poured into the fire, after

thoroughly cleaning the stele. Next, they used golden cups to scoop up some wine from the bowl, and while pouring a libation onto the fire they swore that they would adjudicate in conformity with the regulations inscribed on the stele, would punish any past infringements, would henceforth knowingly infringe none of the regulations, and would neither
 b rule nor obey any ruler unless his injunctions accorded with their father's regulations. Once he had committed himself and his descendants with this vow, each of the kings drank and then dedicated his cup to the god's shrine, before occupying himself with the feast and whatever else he had to do. When darkness fell and the sacrificial fire had cooled down, they all put on gorgeous robes of dark blue, sat down in the dark on the ground by the charred remains of the sacrificial
 c victim, and once they had extinguished every flame in the shrine, they turned to the trial. They gave and received judgments for any infringement of the regulations and then, the following day, they inscribed their decisions on a golden tablet, which they dedicated in the shrine, along with their robes, as a memorial.

There were many other rules and customs pertaining only to the prerogatives of each of the kings, but the most important points were that they should never take up arms against one another; that they should resist any attempt to overthrow the royal family in any city; that, as their predecessors had, they should collectively debate any decisions
 d that were to be made about all matters such as warfare, while giving overall authority to the descendants of Atlas; and that no king should have the right to put any of his relatives to death, unless half of the ten agreed with his decision.

So much for a description of the mighty power that existed in Atlantis in those days. It was this force that the god* mustered and brought against these regions here, and the account gave the following reason for his doing so. For
 e many generations, as long as Poseidon's nature was vigorous enough in them, they obeyed the laws and were on good terms

with the gods, who were their kin. Because the principles they held were true and perfectly high-minded, and because they reacted with self-possession and practical intelligence to the vicissitudes of life and to one another, they looked down on everything except virtue, counted their prosperity as trivial, and easily bore the burden, so to speak, of the mass 121a of their gold and other possessions. They were not made drunk by the luxury their wealth afforded them; they remained in control of themselves and never stumbled. As sober men do, they saw clearly that even prosperity is enhanced by the combination of mutual friendship and virtue—and that wealth declines and friendship is destroyed by materialistic goals and ambitions.

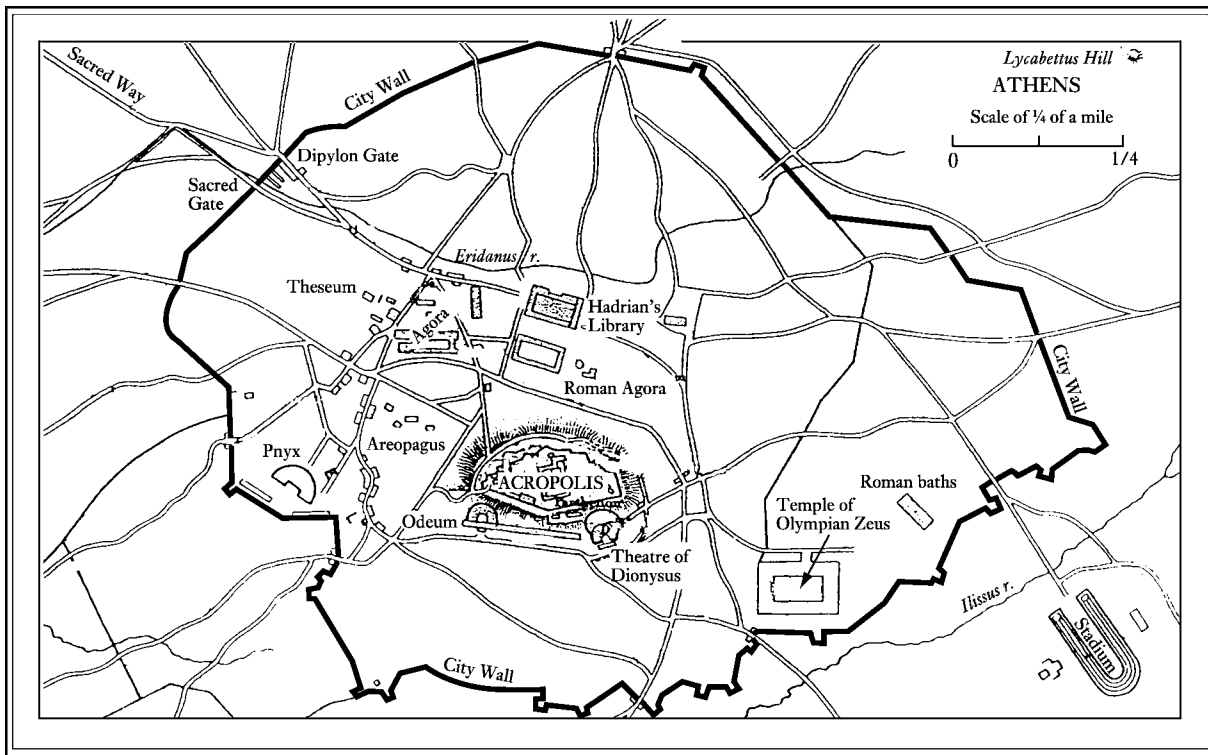
As a result of this kind of reasoning and of the persistence of the divine nature within them, they thrived in all the ways I've described. But when the divine portion within them began to fade, as a result of constantly being diluted by large measures of mortality, and their mortal nature began to pre- b dominate, they became incapable of bearing their prosperity and grew corrupt. Anyone with the eyes to see could mark the vileness of their behaviour as they destroyed the best of their valuable possessions; but those who were blind to the life that truly leads to happiness regarded them as having finally attained the most desirable and enviable life possible, now that they were infected with immoral greed and power.

Zeus, god of gods, who reigns by law, did have the eyes to see such things. He recognized the degenerate state of their fair line and wished to punish them, as a way of introducing c more harmony into their lives. He summoned all the gods to a meeting in the most awesome of his dwellings, which is located in the centre of the entire universe and so sees all of creation. And when the gods had assembled, he said:*

CRITIAS

- 106b *medicine*: this picks up the theme of some of the last pages of *Timaeus*.
- 107d *imprecise and deceptive outline*: Critias' mistake: to say that we are content with a discussion of heavenly bodies that bears only a faint resemblance to them is to assume that we know what they are like, because otherwise we would not know that it was no more than a faint resemblance.
- 108b *competent successor*: Socrates is comparing the speeches to a dramatic competition in Athens, where one after another three tragic playwrights displayed their work, and were explicitly awarded first, second, and third places. Hermocrates changes this to a military metaphor, which Critias extends.
- 108c *Apollo Paean*: soldiers chanted a paean, an invocation of Apollo, before advancing into battle.
- 108e *9,000 years*: actually, at *Timaeus* 23e the Egyptian priest said that Saïs and Egypt were involved in the war, and that Saïs (modern Sa-el Hagar)

- was not founded until 8,000 years previously. Moreover, in *Timaeus* the Atlanteans conscripted troops from this side of the strait, and so the war should not simply be characterized as between those on one side of the strait and those on the other. It is worth bearing in mind from the start that Plato never finished *Critias*, and that there are several indications that what we have of the book remained unrevised.
- 109a *into the ocean*: the mud and shallow water just beyond the Pillars of Heracles were apparently familiar: Aristotle mentions them at *Meteorologica* 354a.
- 109b *no disputes involved*: in keeping with the argument of *Republic* that the gods should not be portrayed in immoral terms, Plato denies traditional tales such as that Poseidon and Athena competed to gain patronage of Athens.
- 109d *for courage and intelligence*: see note on *Timaeus* 24c.
- 109d *born from the ground*: see note on *Timaeus* 23e.
- 110b *predecessors of Theseus*: the legendary first kings of Athens.
- 110c *godlike men*: the supposed founders of the city.
- 110d *for our imaginary guardians*: that is, the guardians of the ideal state imagined by Plato in *Republic*, or in the conversation that took place the day before that of *Timaeus*.
- 110e *on the left*: the idea that Attica once extended west as far as the Isthmus of Corinth was irredentist wishful thinking, but Oropus was the site of frequent border disputes between Athens and Boeotia.
- 110e *exempt from working the land*: as opposed to the norm in historical Athens, where citizens had a duty to double up as soldiers and where 90 per cent of them worked the land.
- 111b *the small islands*: quite a few of the smaller islands of the Aegean have little topsoil.
- 112a *in the time of Deucalion*: see *Timaeus* 22b, with note. The ‘single night’ of earthquakes and deluge is presumably the one mentioned at *Timaeus* 25d.
- 112a *opposite the Pnyx*: see Map of Athens (opposite).
- 112d *willing subjects*: the pattern of their leadership was not the more oppressive Athenian empire of the fifth century, but the ideal of the renewed empire of the fourth century, at the time Plato was writing. For further connections between the Atlantis myth and fourth-century Athens, see K. A. Morgan, ‘Designer History: Plato’s Atlantis Story and Fourth-century Ideology’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 118 (1998), 101–18. For the general thesis that the Atlantis myth was made up by Plato partly as a ‘political parable’ with messages for his contemporaries, partly to reflect the constitution of *Republic*, and partly as a piece of fiction, see C. Gill, ‘The Genre of the Atlantis Story’, *Classical Philology*, 72 (1977), 287–304, and the other papers by Gill listed in the Select Bibliography.



MAP OF ANCIENT ATHENS

- 113b *you now know why*: since Plato himself invites us to find the names of the inhabitants of Atlantis meaningful, here is a list of their meanings: Ampheres, ‘well made’; Atlas, ‘enduring’; Autochthon, ‘born from the ground’; Azaes, ‘enviable’; Cleito, ‘bright fame’; Diaprepes, ‘glorious’; Elasippus, ‘horse-rider’; Eumelus, ‘rich in sheep’; Evaemon, ‘of good blood’; Evenor, ‘man of courage’; Leucippe, ‘white horse’; Mestor, ‘adviser’; Mneseus, ‘rememberer’.
- 113c *fifty stades*: on the Athenian scale a foot is 29.6 cm, a plethron is 29.6 m, and a stade is 177.6 m.
- 113d *pivot of a lathe*: more precise measurements are given at 115e–116a. For the general features of the city area, see Figure 1.
- 113e *been invented*: Plato leaves it ambiguous whether Poseidon is creating a utopian paradise, which was corrupted by later generations of Atlanteans, or the kind of place that would inevitably encourage the greed that would lead to the island’s downfall. Poseidon is quite the opposite of the gods of Timaeus’ speech (and the ideal gods of *Republic*): so far from being ‘free of jealousy’ (*Timaeus* 29e), Poseidon guards or imprisons his beloved away from everyone else.
- 114b *Gadeira*: modern Cadiz.
- 114c *as I said before*: *Timaeus* 25a–b.
- 114e *solid or fusible*: solid products are presumably minerals and stones, while fusible ones are all the metals. The simplicity of primeval Athens is contrasted with the profusion of ancient Atlantis, with its multiplicity of shrines, territories, types of building, and so on.
- 114e *orichalc*: ‘orichalc’ was a perfectly acceptable word (meaning literally ‘mountain metal’) in ancient Greek for copper alloys, or for the yellow copper ore used in such alloys. As such it was certainly ‘more than just a name’ in Plato’s time, so he is using the term to refer to some more precious (and more fabulous) metal.
- 115b *his satiety*: we do not know what fruit was offered diners to relieve satiety — perhaps a lemon.
- 115d *fifty stades long*: see note on 113c.
- 115e *underground sailing passage below*: it is hard to see how the struts supporting the bridges could coincide with the mouths of these underground canals, especially since in at least one instance the canal is wider than the bridge: the bridges are 1 plethron wide (116a) and the outermost canal is 3 plethra wide.
- 116d *the appearance of the temple*: it is non-Greek in its over-lavish use of precious metals and in its enormous size (three times larger than the Parthenon), but its basic design is Greek, and many Greek temples were gaudy themselves.

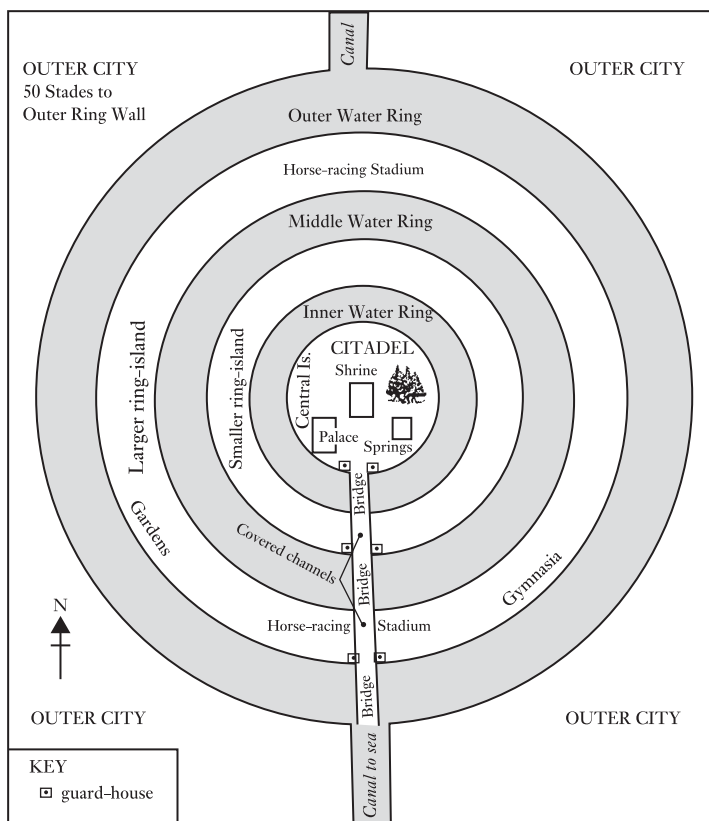


FIGURE 1. The capital city of Atlantis. After C. J. Gill, *Plato: The Atlantis Story* (Bristol Classical Press, 1980)

- 116d *acroteria*: ornamental devices crowning the top or side angles of the triangular pediment of an ancient Greek temple.
- 116e *this many Nereids*: in classical times there were usually thought to be fifty of them. Nereids were sea-nymphs, and as such they often accompanied Poseidon.
- 117c *bodyguards*: perhaps for the first time a sour note is struck, since to Greek thinking bodyguards indicated tyranny rather than fair and tolerant leadership.

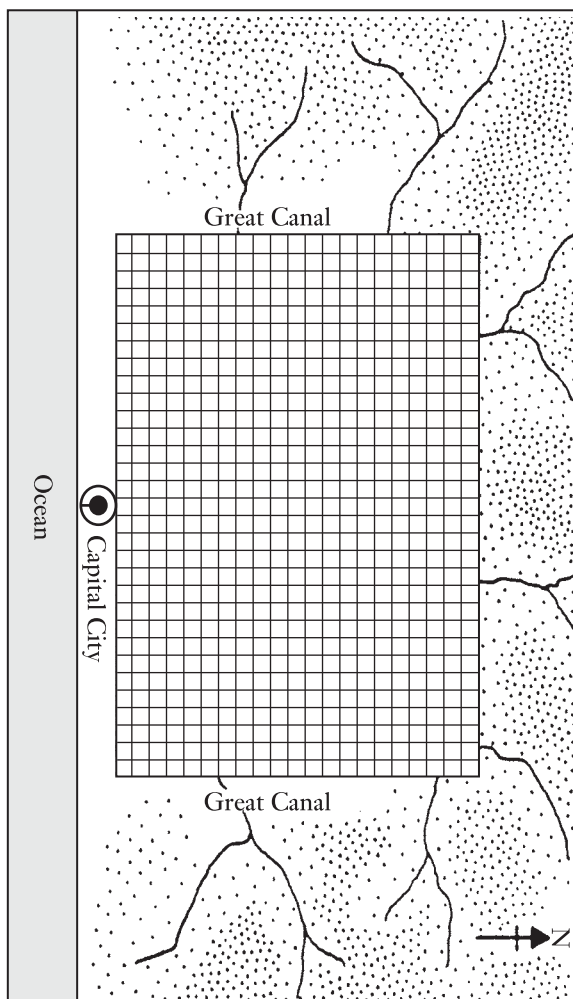


FIGURE 2. The coastal plain of Atlantis. After C. J. Gill, *Plato: The Atlantis Story* (Bristol Classical Press, 1980)

NOTES TO PAGES 115–21

- 118b *faced south*: because there were mountains to the north, west, and east: see Figure 2.
- 120d *the god*: it was Zeus, as we discover at 121b, who sent the Atlanteans against primeval Athens, as a roundabout way of punishing the Atlanteans.
- 121c *he said*: the work breaks off here, and Plato never completed it. He would have continued at least with an account of how the punishment Zeus ordained for Atlantis was that it was to be defeated by the paradigm of virtue, primeval Athens, and a description of the war.